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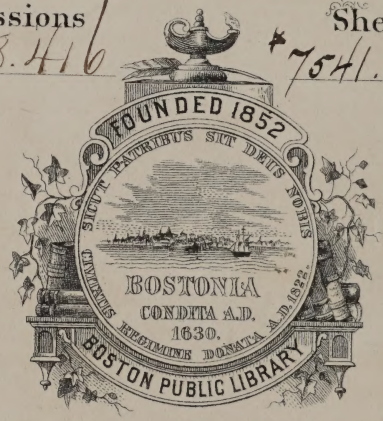

Received Mar. 22, 1889.

TESTIMONY OF

Dea. Frederick D. Allen,

IN FAVOR OF LEASING THE

OLD SOUTH MEETING-HOUSE.

Given before the Committee on Parishes and Religious Societies.

C.

BOSTON:
ALFRED MUDGE & SON, PRINTERS, 34 SCHOOL STREET.
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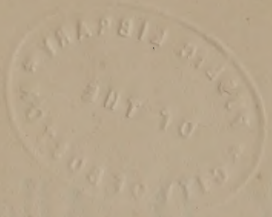

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The Old South Church has a history of more than two hundred years. In 1669, twenty-nine men and twenty-three women (fifty-two in all) were organized into a Church of Christ. The present Old South Church is the successor of the same organization. There have been additions to this church every year from 1669 until this time, 1874, with the exception of three or four years. In 1776 and 1777, while the British troops occupied the meeting-house, the church was scattered and there were no additions.

All these years there has been a band of devoted Christian men and women, who, with a succession of able and faithful pastors, have labored together for the moral and religious welfare of each passing generation.

Now the *responsibility* of carrying on this work and history, and transmitting it in full vigor to the generation to come, devolves on the present members of this church and society. We cannot live on our past history: every successive age has to make history for itself, good or bad. We cannot avoid it. Any individual family or community who try to live upon the reputation of their ancestors, are sure to come to nothing themselves.

What gives truest value and *interest* to the history of the *Old* South Church? Is it merely the building in which they have worshipped, or is it the words and works and *characters* of those worshipping there, — the *living church? Certainly the latter.* Now it is just this living, praying, working church which we wish to perpetuate and transmit to those

who come after us. Can this be done in the old place? We say, No. Why? Because the people on whom we must rely, are not there and cannot be brought there.

In 1845, when the self-imposed exception to our right to lease was placed on the church edifice, that church was surrounded by a large population. Through Milk, Franklin, Federal, Atkinson, Pearl, High, and Summer Streets, as well as to the south of these, were dwelling-houses, occupied, to a large extent, by the best portion of our citizens. Business was just beginning to encroach on this territory, but in all the streets I have named, there does not now remain a single dwelling-house — *not one.* On this same ground were then many churches. The Seamen's Chapel (Purchase Street), the Riply or Coolidge Church (corner of Pearl and Purchase Streets), Freewill Baptist Church (foot of Summer Street), the Channing Church (Federal Street), Catholic Cathedral (Franklin Street), New South (on Church Green), First Church (Chauncy Street), Trinity Church (Summer Street), Rowe Street Baptist Church, Second Church, Doctor Robbins's (Bedford Street), the Union Church (Essex Street), and, last of all, the St. Stephen's Chapel (Purchase Street). Of these twelve places of worship, none remain, and all except the last mentioned, are rebuilt or reorganized and at work in other parts of the city where they are needed.

While these changes have been going on, the Old South Church has been working on, doing what it could to gather up the fragments, and adapt itself to the changed surroundings. The church has been made to a great extent free, for several years past.

As the Freeman Place Chapel, which we then used for social meetings and Sunday school, was near the rooms of the Y. M. C. Association, then in the Tremont Temple, we were enabled to gather some forty to sixty young people into

Bible classes. The Association has since removed to Eliot Street. Our regular attendance at the Old South Sabbath services has for years been steadily diminishing. Those upon whom the responsibility of sustaining the church rests, have long regarded the ultimate removal of our place of worship as inevitable.

Some four or five years since, we made a careful investigation as to the residences of those who had been and were regular attendants at Old South.

It was found that a majority resided south of Dover Street, and west of Charles Street, from one to one and one half miles away. The children and young people of these families found other Sunday schools nearer at hand, attended by their neighbors and schoolmates. These had naturally greater attractions to them than the far-away old church and the dingy chapel. The young element of all these families was slipping away from us.

It was, therefore, decided and voted, to purchase a lot of land prospectively, for a church, chapel, and parsonage. This was done four years ago. In choosing the site, two things were kept in mind. First, the convenience of the majority of our regular worshippers. Second, to locate where the future growth of the city would be sure to furnish a congregation, yet not in close proximety to other churches, but well out beyond them all. The chosen site, corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets, is of easy access, over the Dartmouth Street Bridge, to all the South End. It is one half mile from Charles Street, and will accommodate all on the Back Bay. It is less than one and one half miles from the farthermost family in our parish at the North West End. It is as near most of the families living in this direction as the old church in Milk Street was to Dover Street. Accordingly, the decided minority who live in this neighberhood, will have no further to go to the new place,

than the majority living at the South End and Back Bay have for years been compelled to go, to reach the old place.

The new location when selected was one fourth of a mile from any other church building. Since the land was bought, three other churches — Trinity, Brattle St., and the Second Church (Dr. Robbins's) — have located this side, east of us. We still remain out beyond them all. We began building the chapel about two years ago (long before the great fire occurred.) The parsonage was commenced soon after; the church, about a year since, which will probably be completed in a year (or a year and a half) from this time.

The whole structure, when done, is designed to be in keeping with the history, and a fit successor of the old edifice on Washington Street. It will contain all the modern requirements for church work, being adapted for preaching, Sunday school, evening services, committee meetings, sewing circles, social gatherings, reading room, pastor's study, etc. The old edifice has only the one audience room for preaching: nothing else whatever. Yet it is only fair to say that our new buildings are no better for these days, as compared with present private residences, than the old house when built one hundred and fifty years ago, was for those times; moreover, it will cost less than the old building is worth to-day. We only change the place and structure in conformity to the change of population, and the present ideas of church work and church architecture.

At the time of the fire, Nov. 1872, the City Government took possession of the old meeting-house, and turned it into barracks for soldiers, which, with the effects of the fire, rendered it entirely unfit for church services. After that time, the church held their services in the Freeman Place Chapel, until the new chapel was finished in April last, *when*, by vote of the church, and the pew proprietors both, we removed to the new building corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets.

That is now the only proper and legal place of worship for the Old South Church and Society. The records of the church and society, its history, and all that belongs thereto, are transplanted to the new place, and there we expect they will remain so long as it is a fitting place for them.

We are told that it is unsafe to intrust so large a property to a few men; that although they may be honest now, there is no guarantee that their successors may not be false. Is not that true of every trust? When the legal custodians of this property prove unfaithful, let them be impeached. Till then, they are entitled to public confidence. But suppose this property were divided, as the remonstrants seem to desire, what security would the standing committee have that the other portion would not fall into dishonest hands? *They*, the standing committee, are legally responsible for the whole. They are bound by solemn oaths as honest, conscientious, true men (I know them to be such.) Must they not administer this trust according to their own sense of right, devoting it to the purposes and only for the purposes for which it was given?

Again it is said, that this property comes from olden time very much increased in value, and it is doubtful whether we have a right to it. We did not give the money out of our own pockets, and we have no right to take the proceeds or income of it, to build a new church. We should raise the money and pay for that ourselves.

Apply this doctrine to common life, — that no one can inherit or use what comes to them from their ancestors. It would be likely to find opposition from some who are here to-day opposing our petition.

But we are said to be individually rich, and not in need of these large funds. Even though this were true, shall we any the less cease to adminster this trust with fidelity to the terms of the bequest?

But, compared with those around us, we are not a rich church or society (if we except the remonstrants). A few might be called rich, none *wealthy* (in the accepted use of that term). To be sure we have many active business men, in fair circumstances, but they are all the makers of their own fortunes. They have *not inherited* fortunes. The large majority of our people are in quite moderate circumstances, while many are poor. We welcome and try to help all. We now ask the Legislature to allow us to lease the old meeting-house to enable us to pay for the new church, and to devote all the income derived therefrom to the purposes for which it was given, two hundred years ago, by Madam Norton.

We believe in the right of petition and remonstrance from all competent and intelligent citizens who understand the subject-matter involved; but we believe that, for persons to put their names to papers for the sake of numbers, when they have no intelligent comprehension of the subjects in question, is an imposition on the Legislature and its committees.

I called a short time since on a very worthy old couple, poor people, members of our church. They had signed one of these papers called a remonstrance. I asked them why they signed it. They said they were told it was to prevent our selling the Old South Church. The man said he didn't believe anybody would buy the Old South unless it was the Catholics, and the idea of having it sold to "the Catholics" was dreadful, and so they signed the paper. When I explained the matter, they were very sorry and wished they could get their names off, and wished they could sign the petition. They were willing to have the meeting-house let for business, or torn down to the ground; but the idea of its falling into the hands of the Catholics "was horrible." (I use their own words.) So I think it is with many others

who have signed these papers. They have done it under a misapprehension of facts, which, if they could know, they would rather be petitioners than remonstrants.

When we consider the time and effort put forth to procure signatures of *present* and *past members* of the *church* and *society* (which may include every person who has attended public worship at Old South for the last fifty years), I am amazed that they have not succeeded better. Now let us analyze these four remonstrances.

They have sixty-eight names: two have altered their minds, and signed the petition; fifteen are married men, heads of families, including the old man alluded to; eleven are the wives of the fifteen men. Of the fifteen men, one left years ago and joined an Episcopal Church; four or five others have not attended the Old South often; some have not been inside the church for ten years or more, leaving those who may be called attendants, nine; of these, six are pew proprietors. Of the nine, I think only two or three are under sixty years of age; only two have children under age, and only one has children in the Sunday school.

Seven are the daughters of the above men.

Six are aged widows, mostly over eighty years of age.

Four other women, mostly old.

Two other men.

Four unknown.

Seventeen unmarried women, from thirty to eighty years of age or more.

There may be slight variations from this; but it is mainly correct.

I would treat with the highest respect the feelings of all those who have signed these papers intelligently and in sincerity. I can appreciate their desires and feelings, and would consider them with the kindest sympathy; for it shows in them a deep interest in the old meeting-house, where they

and their fathers have worshipped God, and about which cluster so many precious memories. But do they realize the responsibility they assume in asking that the Old House may be opened for them on the Sabbath? Have they counted the cost? Do they realize that, if their request should be granted, not one half their small number would ever meet together within the walls of the old church on the same Sabbath? And who would they find around them? Not the old familiar faces they have been wont to look upon, but strangers, drawn in from curiosity, or the love of old things. The outside world who would be seen there I think would seem cold and cheerless to them. Would they not be likely to find far more sympathy and friendship from those who, from an *imperative* sense of duty, and to save the church from destruction, have left and gone to the new place? Do they not suppose that these, too, have tender memories of the past? And have they not left the sanctuary of their fathers, many of them with deep feelings of regret? They have gone, not because they wished, but because the providence of God as plainly indicated to them their duty, as the pillar of cloud and fire taught Israel of old, that they must take up their sanctuary and remove to another place. Will it not be much better for these friends to come with us, and help us to rebuild the walls of our Zion in the new place?

I have not referred to the ages of those who have signed these papers for any unkind purpose, but to show that most of them will not long need an earthly sanctuary; a few passing years and they will be gone. Will it not be much better for them now to cease from looking behind and brooding on the memories of the past, but to look forward with cheer and hope to the glorious things attainable for all who will seek them in the future.

With regard to the twelve remonstrances from the country, the committee have as good a chance to judge as we have.

We see that the Rev. R. Crawford, D. D., who signs himself Secretary of the Pocompsock Valley Memorial Association, has been busy on the Connecticut River, at Deerfield, and probably elsewhere. These papers seem to be signed largely by women, and from the spelling of the names, we think, children, who probably never saw the Old South, — many of them, probably, know or care as little about the matter as the "heathen Chinee." "The Clerical," 126, show signs of a vast amount of correspondence, postage, etc.

A witness has said here, and it was corroborated by two others who are signers of the remonstrances, that the Old South Church was needed not only for the large population living in boarding-houses, etc., in the centre of the city, but also for the great North End of middling interest people; also for seamen who need the Old South Meeting-house on the old spot. He had looked into the subject, and thought that one half of the population of Boston proper (that is, the peninsula alone) live on the north side of a line drawn from the State House to Cambridge Bridge; on the west and on the east, from the State House to the water. A reference to the map shows this to be substantially the area of wards two, three, and four. But according to the United States census, taken in 1870, these wards contained a population of just 50,118; of this total, however, 20,083 were foreign born, leaving but 30,035 native born. But we learn, however, that a large proportion of these native born, who are put down in the census, are the children of foreign parents (though they themselves are born on our shore); they must therefore be reckoned for church purposes as essentially foreign. We are obliged to reduce the amount of the nominally native born to about 16,000 to 18,000 as a generous estimate of the number who could possibly be induced to attend Protestant worship. The remainder are nearly all Roman Catholics. Now, wards five to eleven, which make

up the rest of the old city proper, have a population of 128,-013, — more than two and one half times as large as that lying north of the line referred to, — and the wards south have a larger proportion who are of American stock and Protestant in their religion. It turns out, therefore, that the north of the linei, nstead of a population of 110,000 or 115,-000, as this witness made it out, contained four years ago, a sum total of about 50,000, and of these only 16,000 to 18,-000 are strictly American. It would seem, therefore, to be absolutely demonstrated, that the wants of this territory of which so much has been made, are wholly imaginary and not real.

As to seamen. There are four seamen's chapels along the shore towards the North End, — the Episcopal, Baptist, the Bethel, North Square (once Father Taylor's), and, last, the Salem and Mariners' Church, Salem Street, which many years since passed into the hands of the Seamen's Friend Society, and where good service is rendered by a chaplain, and a band of young men and women from the Old South and other churches, who have gone down there to teach in Sunday school, and do missionary work in that part of the city. These churches and chapels, however, are not half filled. Surely the Old South is not needed for the sailors — you could not get them there.

This same witness gave it as his opinion, also, that it would take fifty years to get a congregation in the new church on the Back Bay, or before the church would be wanted there. But when we remember that it is now scarcely twenty years since the first house was built on the Back Bay, we see what his opinion is worth. What are the facts? The new Old South, corner of Boylston and Dartmouth Streets, is to-day the centre of a larger population, within convenient distance from that place, say one half mile, than the Old South, cor ner of Washington and Milk Streets, has in the same dis-

tance around it. That part of Ward 6, on the Back Bay, containing, probably, 6,000, and Ward 9, in which the new chapel is situated, contains 14,000. You cannot find that amount of population within the same distance of corner of Washington and Milk Streets. Besides, the class of people around the new place is far more hopeful for church work than the other. I would not have dwelt so long on this testimony, were it not that the three witnesses corroborated it, and it is said that in the mouth of two or three witnesses the thing is established.

Do not suppose that we think these three witnesses intended to deceive the committee: far from it. They deceive themselves. Taking council of their wishes or prejudices, they shut their eyes to the fact, that the homes of the people are fast leaving the old parts of the city for the more convenient and cheaper homes in the newer parts. In passing across the Dartmouth Street Bridge, near our new chapel, we find whole blocks and streets filled with families in moderate circumstances, as well as lodging-rooms and boarding-houses. We shall do all we can to reach these people and help them heavenward. Every day confirms us that the location of our new church is most favorable. It is the centre of the only place left in the city proper where residences can be built of the class which the people demand. What did the witnesses from the Tremont Temple prove? Simply this: that their Sabbath services draw as full houses on Sunday, as lectures, concerts, theatricals, Japanese jugglers, and the like do on the other days of the week. The fact is, that place is a public hall, to which play-bills and advertisements draw crowds almost every day or evening in the week. For these entertainments the people have to pay their money other days, but Sundays it is all free. This has much to do (with a certain class) with the popularity of the Temple on Sunday.

Thus audiences are attracted to this semi-secular Temple

in preference to the more quiet and orderly services in churches consecrated only to the worship of God.

What should we think if the King's Chapel people (because they had a "good stand on a public thoroughfare") should open their house five or six days in the week to such exhibitions? Would that congregation go to their place of worship on Sunday morning with the same feeling they now do? Would they not feel that somehow the place had lost its sacredness? Would not the continuance of these things be likely to lower the tone of religious feeling, draw in a crowd on Sunday, and turn the whole working of the place into a kind of religious rabble, who think more of numbers and excitement than truth and the love of God?

I have never doubted but that the Old South Meeting-house could be filled every Sunday. Turn it into a kind of religious theatre. You need not have the Black Crook, but a kind of moral plays to compare with the sacred concerts which are given nowadays in the theatres on Sunday evenings. Now, with a bill of this kind, with a *star actor*, and a competent "live" manager and assistants, there is no doubt you would draw a crowd from the North End and all around, particularly as the theatres are not allowed to open on Sunday; then, should you have the house open other days and evenings in the week for concerts, exhibitions, etc., the masses would soon learn the way thither, particularly as the house is on a "great thoroughfare and a good stand." This you may say is a burlesque, and making light of serious things. We do not think the remonstrants, with all their zeal to have the Old South open for Sabbath services, would consent to anything of the kind; but let me say that, unless they resort to something approaching this, they never can secure large audiences in the Old South on Sabbath days. While it seemed needful to treat this matter with some ridicule in order to explain its workings, you will not suppose me to

imply that there is not some good accomplished, to some individuals, at the Tremont Temple. We think there is, but it is not unmixed good; it draws away many who would be better off elsewhere. If all the crowds who go there would connect themselves with some good religious society nearest their homes, and avail themselves of privileges thus offered, it would be a great advantage to the individuals themselves, as well as the churches.

The clergyman from the Tremont Temple testified distinctly that the possibility of gathering any considerable numbers at the Sabbath services at the Old South, by the aid of volunteer ministers, would be more than doubtful. It *could not* be done.

The chief argument now used why our petition should not be granted is, that the old house is still imperatively needed for the multitude of people here in the centre of the city who are in danger of being left without adequate church accommodations. I propose to contribute to this subject, not merely estimates and assertions, as some others have done, but facts which can be demonstrated. Standing at the Old South, corner of Washington and Milk Streets, and draw a line a fourth of a mile therefrom, and what churches or houses called place of worship do we find:—

1. St. Paul's Episcopal, room and a new rector.
2. Park Street Church, Orthodox, Mr. Murray, some room there yet.
3. Methodist Church, Bromfield Street, room for five hundred or more.
4. King's Chapel, Unitarian, not full.
5. Doctor Neal's, Baptist, room for five hundred or more.
6. Doctor Kirk's, Mr. Herrick's, Orthodox, room for five hundred and welcome.
7. Swedenborgian Church, Bowdoin Street, room for more.

8. Freeman Place Chapel, Beacon Street, Freewill Baptist, room.

9. Wesleyan Chapel, Bromfield Street, Universalist, room.

10. Music Hall, Winter Street, room.

11. Tremont Temple.

Here are eleven places open on Sabbath days, — seven denominations. These are capable of seating more than 12,000 people. Now, who reside in this central district? Starting at the corner of Tremont and Winter Streets, go down Winter, across Washington Street, down Summer Street to the water, and along the water to Long Wharf, thence up State Street, across Washington Street, through Court, to Pemberton Square (and including that), to Somerset Street, then to Ashburton Place, through to Bowdoin Street, thence to Beacon and Park Streets, and down to the corner whence we started. Here is a district one half mile across each way, with the Old South Church nearly in the centre. Do you ask what is the population of this district? I answer, the whole number within this line, men, women, and children, foreign and American, is less than 2,500 souls,* and the materials of which this population is made up are such, either from their nationality, religion, or avocations, that not one half the number could be induced to attend any Protestant place of worship. So, then, we have more than 12,000 sittings for less than 1,200 to occupy them.

The statement of the Rev. Mr. Foote, of King's Chapel, has been cited, concerning the large congregations gathered there on Sunday afternoons. With reference to the question before us, the fact of such an assemblage on these occasions

* This was ascertained by examination of the original U. S. Census returns of 1870. The exact population being 2,028, — 1,180 American and 848 foreign born; but the census taker estimates that the population has decreased at least twenty-five per cent since 1870, reducing it to 1,521.

is as little to the point as the great concourse at Faneuil Hall at the Centennial Tea Party would be to the character of the North End population.

Those who attended the King's Chapel service on the occasion referred to, will tell you, that the audience was made up of the regular worshippers at other churches, who, because of the special eminence and reputation of the preacher advertised, left their own services. How many of them belonged to that central district? I venture to say not one dozen.

Yet the remonstrants have gone so far as to subscribe to a guarantee fund of $2,700 per annum for five years towards defraying the expenses of worship in the Old South. *Provided* the standing committee will grant them the use of the house, keep in repair, insure, or risk, and take care of it. Can any one doubt, that should this be granted them, with their volunteer preachers, it would fail in a few weeks. After will and curiosity were expended, the whole thing would become tedious and stale, and in the end go out in darkness and disgrace.

Deliver the Old South from such an end.

Much is said of the corrupting influence of wealth on a religious society; they become proud and look down on and repel the poor. This may be the experience of some, but we have not felt it yet at the Old South. The poor are as welcome as the rich. All who come with us, desiring to receive and improve the rich blessings of a good religious home, are welcome.

It has been said here that the taxes on the pews in the old church were very small. They were fixed long time ago by the fathers, and have so continued. In our new chapel on Dartmouth Street seats are free to all. When our new church is done, the subject of taxes will come up and no doubt will be settled rightly, but I do hope that they will

not be so high as to exclude the poor or middling classes. I trust *they* will always find a home and a welcome with us.

It is said that in foreign cities, churches are left in the midst of the marts of trade, etc., like St. Paul's in London, I suppose. Well, there, Church and State are united. If they see fit to retain their old churches, that may be right for them; but it is no criterion for us. The Cathedral in Cologne has been six hundred years in building and is not finished yet. Is that an example for us? Each individual family, parish, and nation must act for themselves, responsible only to God and the laws under which they live. We don't wish to return to the dark ages.

A witness handed in a list of seventy-seven persons, including forty-one church members, who live in this part of the city, who might be inconvenienced by the change of our place of worship. We find on examination that more than half of these are with us, and cheerfully co-operating with us at the new place. I don't think they could be induced to go to the old place were it open. When they cannot go to the new church, they can go to the Chambers Street Chapel, where they will have good preaching and plenty of work.

We have no doubt but that some of our people would find it more convenient to attend worship at the old place than the new; but must the best interests, yes, the very life of the church, be sacrificed to the convenience of a few? but, really, how much do these few people suffer? None of them can reach the Old South in Washington Street, without passing several places of worship. Two, at least, of our own denomination are nearer the residences of all these people than the old place. The Chambers-Street Chapel can easily be reached by all of them if they will go there.

Towards the remonstrants we shall never entertain any unkind feelings; we have no quarrel with them. We are here simply to perform a solemn duty to our church. We shall

be glad if they all remain with us; but if they find themselves better accommodated or better pleased elsewhere, we shall always wish them well.

Our city is growing in numbers and expanding in territory. Look at the new map of Boston. The old centre is given up to business; but see these wide outskirts, they are filling up with people; they will want schools, churches, and religious privileges. We can use all the income from the Old South property in aiding these people in securing good religious homes. We can also look after the wants of the poor in the old parts of the city. Will it not be wrong to waste the means we have for good down in this desert of warehouses, where, for every living being left, there is now ample church room and means of religious improvement, if they can be persuaded to avail themselves of them?

NOTE.—From the eleventh page and onward this paper was written in answer to witnesses called by the Remonstrants, and could be better understood if their testimony was printed; but in the pamphlet issued by them purporting to be testimony before the Committee on Parishes, only such testimony is printed as favors their side. Even when by the cross questioning such testimony was proved worthless, they still print it, so that their pamphlet, so far as testimony before the committee is concerned, is wholly one-sided.

(Nov., 1887, 20,000)

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